

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENNA 1733

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, AU
SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN DEFENSE POSTURE AND POLITICS

SUMMARY: THE AUSTRIAN DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, NOT A VERY VIGOROUS GROWTH AT THE BEST OF TIMES, HAS BEEN HARD HIT BY THE LUETGENDORF AFFAIR. IT IS BESET WITH OTHER PROBLEMS TOO--EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT, A NEW, CONTROVERSIAL NATIONAL DEFENSE CONCEPT PROPOUNDED BY THE ARMY COMMANDER AND OPPOSED BY OTHER LEADING OFFICERS, RESULTING PERSONALITY CONFLICTS AND, MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, A CHANCELLOR WHO IS UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT DEFENSE IN GENERAL, AND LACK OF MONEY. AUSTRIA HARDLY WEIGHS HEAVILY IN THE EAST-WEST MILITARY SCALES, BUT THE NET RESULT OF CURRENT TRENDS WILL VERY LIKELY BE TO CONFIRM THE COUNTRY'S STATUS AS A MILITARY VACUUM AND TO FURTHER REDUCE THE AUSTRIAN PEOPLE'S BELIEF IN THE POSSIBILITY OR EVEN THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL DEFENSE EFFORT OF REALISTIC PROPORTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. DEFENSE ISSUES ARE MUCH IN THE NEWS IN AUSTRIA THESE DAYS. THE LUETGENDORF CASE (VIENNA 0701) STILL AWAITS THE OUTCOME OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION WHICH IS DUE TO BRING IN ITS FINDINGS AT THE END OF MARCH.

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2. MEANTIME, MEDIA AND PUBLIC ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON THE QUESTION OF PROCUREMENT OF A REPLACEMENT FOR THE LARGELY OBSOLESCE AUSTRIAN TANK INVENTORY, WHICH IS MOSTLY OF U.S. ORIGIN. TWO FOREIGN TANKS ARE IN CONTENTION, THE SWISS PZ-68 AND THE U.S. M60A3. AUSTRIAN ARMOR SPECIALISTS WANT TO VISIT THE U.S. SOON TO CONDUCT

TESTS OF THE M-60A3. BOTH FOREIGN MINISTER PAHR AND DEFENSE MINISTER LUETGENDORF HAVE BEEN QUOTED PUBLICLY AS FAVORING THE SWISS TANK, BUT IT IS STATED OFFICIALLY THAT NO DECISION WILL BE MADE UNTIL SUMMER.

3. ALSO IN THE RECENT PAST, ARMY COMMANDER SPANNOCCHI HAS PUBLISHED A BOOK (ACTUALLY A REISSUE IN BOOK FORM OF ARTICLES PUBLISHED SOME YEARS AGO) SETTING FORTH A CONTROVERSIAL NATIONAL DEFENSE CONCEPT. SPANNOCCHI DEPARTS FROM THE HITHERTO ACCEPTED VIEW OF ENGAGING AN AGGRESSOR WITH CONVENTIONAL, MOBILE FORMATIONS IN OPEN COUNTRY AND NEAR THE BORDERS. HE ENVISAGES, RATHER, STATIC DEFENSE IN PREPARED, WITHDRAWN POSITIONS BY SMALLER, LOCALLY ORGANIZED UNITS. MEDIA COMMENT DESCRIBING SPANNOCCHI'S CONCEPT AS "PARTISAN WARFARE" IS AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION, BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT HIS IDEAS AS SET FORTH HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS. THEIR ACCEPTANCE COULD MEAN, FOR ONE THING, MUCH CHEAPER DEFENSE--A POINT THAT WILL APPEAL PARTICULARLY TO KREISKY. THERE WOULD BE LITTLE POINT IN BUYING HIGH PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT--OR, FOR THAT MATTER, A REPLACEMENT TANK. SPANNOCCHI'S VIEWS ARE OPPOSED IN INFLUENTIAL QUARTERS IN THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, NOTABLY BY LUETGENDORF HIMSELF AND GENERAL HABERMANN, CHIEF OF THE PLANNING STAFF. LUETGENDORF AND HABERMANN FAVOR A MORE CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE CONCEPT AND PROCUREMENT POLICY, ON THE LINES THAT HAVE EVOLVED SINCE THE CREATION OF THE POST-WORLD WAR II AUSTRIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES. OPPONENTS OF THE SPANNOCCHI APPROACH, HOWEVER, HAVE DIFFICULTY ARTICULATING PUBLICLY THEIR CONFIDENTIAL

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OPPOSITION. THEY MUST TAKE NOTE OF THE FACT THAT AUSTRIANS HAVE NO PARTISAN TRADITION AND LACK THE POLITICAL WILL TO ENGAGE IN PARTISAN WARFARE ON ANY SCALE--POINTS NOT EASY TO CONVEY TO THE PUBLIC WITHOUT POLITICAL FALLOUT. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, CONSIDERABLE PERSONALITY CONFLICT IS ALSO INVOLVED IN CONTROVERSY OVER DEFENSE APPROACHES. PRO-SPANNOCCHI OPINION ACCUES LUETGENDORF AND HABERMANN OF PLANNING FOR THE LAST WAR INSTEAD OF FOR THE FUTURE.

4. THE KEY TO THE SITUATION, AS WITH ANY ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE IN AUSTRIA, IS CHANCELLOR KREISKY--AND MONEY. THE CHANCELLOR'S DISTASTE FOR AN INFLUENTIAL MILITARY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENNA 1733

ESTABLISHMENT IS A MATTER OF RECORD, GOING BACK TO TRADITIONAL SOCIALIST PREJUDICES AND HIS YOUTH AND EARLY POLITICAL EXPERIENCES. KREISKY HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERS PROCUREMENT OF HIGH PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT A WASTE OF MONEY, AND TAKES THE VIEW THAT AUSTRIA'S BEST DEFENSE IS TO BE FOUND IN A SOUND FOREIGN POLICY, NOT SOPHISTICATED HARDWARE. HE USED THE PUBLIC DEBATE THAT ENSUED FROM LUETGENDORF'S STATEMENTS ON REINTERPRETATION OF THE STATE TREATY (VIENNA 0267) TO PUT A DAMPER ON THE AUSTRIAN MILITARY'S INTEREST IN ACQUIRING MORE SOPHISTICATED DEFENSE MISSILES. SPANNOCCHI'S IDEAS SEEM TO CORRESPOND NEATLY WITH THE CHANCELLOR'S PREDILECTION FOR A MODEST DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, AND COULD BE CONSIDERED AS PROVIDING THEORETICAL POLITICAL-MILITARY UNDERPINNINGS TO KREISKY'S VIEWS.

5. THE NEXT STEP IN THIS ONGOING DISCUSSION WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD BE THE REMOVAL OF LUETGENDORF AFTER THE REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION. THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S REMOVAL MAY NOT TAKE PLACE IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER, BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE THAT KREISKY WILL WANT TO RETAIN HIM FOR LONG UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. HE IS CLEARLY A POLITICAL LIABILITY. ONCE LUETGENDORF IS GONE AND A NEW DEFENSE
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MINISTER INSTALLED, A DEBATE ON THE SPANNOCCHI CONCEPT WOULD SEEM TO BE THE NEXT STEP. ONLY FOLLOWING THIS IN TURN WOULD A DECISION BE REACHED ON MAJOR PROCUREMENT ITEMS SUCH AS TANK REPLACEMENT. A MAIN CONSIDERATION --APART FROM STRATEGIC CONCEPTS--IS AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS. IN VIEW OF CURRENT BUDGETARY PROBLEMS, WHICH SEEM LIKELY

TO BECOME MORE AGGRAVATED IN THE TIME AHEAD, KREISKY
MAY WELL DELAY THE DECISION ON THE TANK ISSUE IN PRETTY
MUCH THE SAME WAY HE HAS DRAWN OUT AND PRACTICALLY
QUASHED THE QUESTION OF AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT. THE
"SUMMER" DECISION ON TANK REPLACEMENT NOW BEING MENTIONED
COULD SLIP BADLY.

6 AUSTRIAN DEFENSE IS HARDLY A MAJOR FACTOR IN ANY
REALISTIC MILITARY SCALE, AND THE PRESENT SITUATION IS A
SQUALL IN A VERY DIMINUTIVE COFFEE POT, WITH A LOT OF
VIENNESE WHIPPED CREAM. HOWEVER, CERTAIN POLITICAL-
PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ARE INVOLVED. THE EFFECT MAY BE A
FURTHER GRADUAL WEAKENING OF THE AUSTRIAN DEFENSE POSTURE
IN THE TIME AHEAD, WITH PERHAPS A DEFACTO ACCEPTANCE OF
A SPANNOCCHI-LIKE CONCEPT ON PRACTICAL (BUDGETARY) GROUNDS.
AUSTRIAN DEFENSE WOULD THEN BE AS EVEN MORE HEAVILY WATERED
DOWN COMMODITY THAN IT ALREADY IS, THE COUNTRY'S STATUS AS
MILITARY VACCUM CONFIRMED, AND THE AUSTRIAN PEOPLE'S
INTEREST IN DEFENSE AS A PARATICAL FACTOR IN THE NATIONAL
LIFE EFFECTIVELY REMOVED. BUCHANAN

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